

[NET HUNTERS]

[P. 233-C]

The general observations that can be made 538
from this collection of legends are:

1. The Mbuti of the Epulu are remarkably
little concerned with matters relating to origin
and tradition.

2. Their legends can be classified under three
main sections: legends concerning their social
life, legends relating to the animal and human
kingdoms, and legends concerning the super-
natural. In fact, the second section falls in part
into social relations and in part into super-
natural relations, but we mention it here to
show the correspondence with Joset's (1948)
classification for the archers.

While there are no professional storytellers 538
among the Epulu net hunters, there are in- 564
dividuals who have a greater mastery of the
art than others. They seem to hold an impor-
tant position in the community, especially in
relation to the activities of the *molimo* soci-
ety. The storyteller and the clown seem to [515]
occupy a privileged position and to have a [522].
definite role to play in the men's society.
Whether this also applies to the women of the
elima is not known (p. 216).

Mbuti

Congo - Kinshasa FO1

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221 of the word was ever given to me; it simply refers to an elbow, a
222 chicken or a fallen tree, according to pronunciation. It is pronounced
562 all ways, and all forms of translation are given, stories being invented
535 ad lib to explain the dance.

As people come out of their huts or leave their hearths to join in the line, the movements get more and more suggestive and rhythmic, and when the line is complete couples will break away and dance into the center and there imitate the act of copulation according to their reversed roles, while the others dance around, singing and laughing loudly. Each couple tries to outdo the others in exaggeration and suggestiveness, and just about every conceivable abnormal situation is imitated, dogs, chickens, children, even infants being dragged into the act if they are within reach.

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- [522] The end of the dance is the usual near-hysterical laughter that is brought on by any form of exaggerated mime or storytelling, with the dancers rolling on the ground and clapping their hands to show their amusement. As soon as this has subsided the dance is likely to start all over again for a second or even a third time.

Ekokomea, however, is by no means danced every day, even during the honey season; more than once or twice a week would be rather frequent. It is similar during the *molimo*. So throughout the year the dance is not likely to take place in any one band more than a dozen times. This is one dance that I have seen danced both in the forest and in the village. It is never danced by the villagers, who regard it as a sign of Mbuti depravity, but who nonetheless watch it with the greatest pleasure. The older Mbuti say it would not be danced in the village, but even to them either its exact significance is not clear or else it is something they were unwilling to discuss.

P 221 Much more directly connected with the honey season is a mimetic
222 dance in which the men enact the honey gatherers, the women the
535 bees. The men form a line and dance around the camp as though going through the forest looking and listening for bees. Parallel to them, and sometimes on the verge of the camp or even in the forest, is a line of women. The men sing a honey song, the women buzz like bees. When the men pretend they find the honey and are about to take it, the women descend on them and beat the burning embers they carry above the men's heads so that the sparks fall on them—stinging them like bees, they say. This is often followed by a good-natured fight which may develop either into the tug-of-war or *ekokomea*.

000 Because of the rarity of ritual performances there is one which

554 The various fields in which we can speak of authority fall into three
121 main categories—economic, ritual, and legal. In the first two, by authority is meant prominence of activity and participation in discussion in what is, generally, a normal situation. In the last category, legal, the situation is abnormal, one of dispute, and by authority is meant prominence in the settling of that dispute. Nowhere does it have any validity unless backed by common assent. Yet it is more than mere influence, for in each field certain classes of individuals are recognized as having the right and ability to interpret the pleasure of the forest.

554 Table 8¹ indicates the distribution of this "authority" throughout
561 the band. It will be seen that it is evenly divided between the sexes
[562] and among all adult age levels; only the children are not accorded any authority except among themselves. Further, authority is located at one age level or another or with the nuclear family, with few exceptions. For the life crises (excluding birth), authority is divided between the youths and the elders. Youths and elders also share responsibility for the camp while the hunt is away, even if some of the hunters remain behind.

554 There are many examples of Mbuti who have appeared in the role
[648] of leader vis-à-vis the village, but as their authority was nil in relation to forest life, they need not concern us here. Their only function in the forest, other than their normal role as hunters, was to communicate the wishes of the one group of people to the other.

554 The only individual who might be recognized as occupying a special
156 political position in the life of the hunting band, on any ground other
• 522 than age, is the camp clown. He is usually a hunter, and his position
626 is unofficial, depending on his abilities as an actor and a clown. He
627 is not appointed, and there is no special name for him or his position.

However, every band seems to have its clown. His function is to act as a buff between disputants, deflecting the more serious disputes away from their original sources, absolving other individuals of blame by accepting it himself. Frequently he will end a dispute simply through the use of ridicule, and although such ridicule may be taken as a form of judgment, the essential point is that once again its objective is to divert attention from the source of the dispute and also to divert blame from anyone who is clearly in the wrong. The major concern of all, except possibly the prime disputants, is that the dispute shall be ended, and frequently by creating or reviving another, lesser dispute the clown brings the disputants into the same frame of mind.

¹[see page 330-- Analyst]

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Everyone recognizes that the slightest rift in the band can lead directly to hunger through failure in economic co-operation.

The clown, however, never passes judgment or exerts authority (except through ridicule); he is better considered, in this role, as a professional scapegoat, a person outwardly not deserving respect or authority. Because of his antics, and the Mbuti love of mime, he is popular, but the blame he takes upon himself is often expressed with feeling, and it is only his ability to turn ridicule upon himself and to laugh at himself that rescues him from what would otherwise be constant opprobrium. His status as a hunter is unaffected by his role as a clown, and depends solely on merit.

There is one type of person, however, and there were two examples in the Epulu band, who leans toward the assumption of individual authority. Every Mbuti is nothing if not a powerful individualist who expresses his opinions with force and clarity. But he generally does not claim any support for his opinions other than his own experience and ability. Some men, because of exceptional hunting skill, may come to resent it when their views are disregarded, but if they try to force those views they are very promptly subjected to ridicule. Ekianga and Njobo were two such hunters in the Epulu band. Ekianga was constantly being ridiculed for his matrimonial difficulties (he was a rare Mbuti, with three wives, living in the same camp with his in-laws by sister exchange). Even his elder sister ridiculed him at times. Njobo was sometimes rather unkindly ridiculed for infertility. Out of four successive wives he only managed to sire one child, a son, who became crippled in adolescence with tuberculosis of the leg. His current wife had given birth to a daughter who out of politeness was generally accepted as Njobo's, though all the evidence pointed in other directions. He was, at least, accredited as the social father.

Of the two, Ekianga probably had the more influence in the band, and his unique position as a polygamist was undoubtedly related to both his prowess and his pride. There is, however, no parallel with the situation acutely described by Lévi-Strauss (1955, pp. 325-39) for the Nambikwara. Ekianga was indeed a potential leader, but the band did not derive its major characteristics from him. Still less was generosity demanded of him (in return for his three wives), and by no means was his undoubted dynamism contrasted by a passivity of the rest of the band. Nonetheless, his three wives and all the consequent "noise" were accepted by the band, and although it was not spoken of as an exchange, it was expected of Ekianga that he would be a

GOVERNMENT: INTERNAL

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began more and more frequently to talk from midcamp. Like Asuku, 156
he complained about laziness and bad hunting, common enough 554
complaints but seldom aired from midcamp. When he began to claim 578
special attention by virtue of being Njobo's "son," however, he was 156
promptly ridiculed. People stopped listening to him, even from mid- 554
camp, and dared him to name them—a procedure that commands 578
attention. Even unmarried youths called out, "Your noise will kill us 558
all," and children began to imitate his whining voice. Masisi, a cousin 152
of Njobo and, with Manyalibo, about to move from the status of 626
hunter to that of elder, took Mbaaka aside at one point and talked to
him quietly, recalling what had happened to Asuku.

Seeing that Mbaaka at last had begun to listen to reason, his 152
brother, who up till then had never interfered, made a loud and rude 156
joke that brought the whole camp down with laughter, then said, 626
"Everyone is crazy—I'm going to sleep," and promptly went to sleep. 522
Masisi then returned to midcamp with Mbaaka and said that if any- 554
one else tried to be funny he would turn himself into a villager and
bewitch everyone. A youth took up the thread and said that the vil-
lage was responsible for all the noise anyway, because his girl friend
never listened to him any more and was a bad cook (a typical
pygmaean non sequitur). This rather forced good humor persisted
throughout the next day, with the women telling jokes and laughing
loudly the moment the conversation drifted in the direction of
Mbaaka's former complaints. There were a few more remarks to the
effect that the village was indeed responsible for all the noise, and the
rest of Mbaaka's stay (two further months) was unmarred by any
repeated claims to privilege through kinship to Njobo.

It is plain, then, that while any movement toward individual 554
authority, conscious or otherwise, is sharply countered, and while 626
individual authority is virtually nil, there is nonetheless a clear basic
framework to support the values of the hunting band. There is the
division of leadership, according to field, throughout the entire band,
yet there is the midcamp site from which anyone may harangue all
present. Although he has no means of compelling attention, it is gen-
erally accorded, and may be further compelled by pointing to or nam-
ing the individuals concerned. Further it is plain that the elders, in- 554
cluding those hunters whose position is being gradually taken over 626
by their children, act as final arbitrators, always careful to stress that 561
what they say is a matter of their opinion, or of their heart. Only 708
when unanimity is beyond question is an opinion or an action con-

GOVERNMENT: INTERNAL

189/52

one on the forehead, which is considered a dangerous spot. In the frequent marital disputes, any man who hits his wife on the head or in the face promptly loses any sympathy he might have had from his fellows. A dispute that follows such lines almost invariably ends with an elder, male or female, physically interposing himself between the disputants, who then revert to hurling abuse which becomes more and more exaggerated until it is so humorous that even they join in the laughter. Alternatively they may lapse into a sulk, which will last for the rest of the day and through the evening, but will be gone in ample time for the next day's hunt to take place as though nothing had happened.

If a dispute becomes widened in scope, however (and this is generally achieved by one of the disputants naming someone, either in his own support or as a supporter of his antagonist), it will ultimately involve the entire subsection of the camp, and quite possibly the whole camp. In either case the process is the same. Whatever the cause of the dispute, it is still regarded as essentially the concern of the individuals concerned. Rather than attempt a probably impossible reconciliation of the excited participants, the rest of the band joins in an effort to divert attention away from the actual cause of the dispute. If this fails, they attempt to dissipate the blame by raising all sorts of minor but associated disputes, so that a number of people become involved. If blame still seems inescapable, the camp clown is likely to try and take it on himself, or else it will be put upon him by the others. The disputants, in my experience, accept this device as a genuine solution. There is no attempt whatsoever, nor have I heard of it in other bands, to make any restitution other than verbal.

As already mentioned, a dispute may be stopped simply by making life intolerable for the disputants by miming them and throwing them into ridicule. If these measures fail and the dispute persists, the hunting automatically suffers, and if no reconciliation is effected, the band splits, either forming two subsections or remaining as a single band, with the splinter section joining another band, at least temporarily.

Not only is the attachment of blame avoided or dissipated as rigorously as possible, and restitution largely ignored, but punishment is almost completely unknown. There are one or two instances where a youth might be thrashed by communal decision, but they are rare and foreign to Mbuti nature. Closer to an indigenous system of pun-

754 11. Sau was the mother of Amabosu, who had exchanged sisters
578 with Ekianga. Sau was regarded by the villagers as a dangerous witch,
a role she filled with zeal and which the Mbuti found useful in two
ways. It provided them with a scapegoat in the forest just as it was a
handy excuse for any misadventure in the village. In either situation
the latent dramatic possibilities appealed enormously to the old lady's
histrionic susceptibilities. One day Sau asked the wife of Mbaaka, a
nephew of Njobo, for some food. She was refused. That night she
[535] did a little dance in front of Mbaaka's hut, her usual way of showing
[224] her displeasure. The next day, on the hunt, Masisi's son was about to
run in bare-handed to catch a sharp-toothed *sindula* (chevrotain), but
Amabosu persuaded him to take his spear. He did so, and then col-
lided with Mbaaka, spearing him in the side.

There was actually some bad feeling between Amabosu and
Mbaaka, and in case this was brought up (making it seem that
Amabosu had deliberately caused his injury) the discussion of the
incident was quickly turned to the refusal of Mbaaka's wife to give
Sau food. She thus became the prime target for blame, with Sau act-
ing as a secondary scapegoat, being criticized for dancing her "bad
dance" outside Mbaaka's hut. In case anyone should take it too se-
riously, Manyalibo promptly started making fun of Sau's dance, flap-
ping his hands to imitate Sau's pendent breasts. This was taken up by
the children, who would not be content until Sau herself gave a dem-
onstration.

626 That evening several hunters stood in midcamp* and said what a
683 good camp it was, and commented on the good hunting. No further
648 word was said about the spearing, except in the village, where the
571 respective *kpara* went to the tribunal to effect reconciliation (between
608 themselves) and blood payment. Amabosu's *kpara* agreed to pay sixty
[186] francs to Mbaaka's *kpara*, Masisi's *kpara* paying only forty. This news
caused great hilarity in the camp, and the comment that villagers were
626 animals, always "eating" each other. Between the Mbuti themselves I
683 could find no evidence of blood payment of any kind, though any
incident involving the drawing of blood is bound to provoke discus-

[68] failure to share in time of need is considered a far greater crime than is petty (i.e., indi-
[15] vidual) theft.

[42] * The importance of the "midcamp" position is that it defines the viewpoint of the
[62] person talking. An individual talking from his own hearth talks as an individual. If he
[156] talks from midcamp he is taking a band rather than an individual point of view. Similarly
the *kumamolimo* is central, but more restricted in area and viewpoint, being used as a
vantage point to discuss with the whole band matters pertaining to the *molimo*.

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578 208 Everyone agreed

626 that after giving birth a woman should be left alone for a while, and
834 that her belly should not become big again until her child became
846 big.

595 One of the many fights that occurred because of this relationship
593 is described in *The Forest People* (Turnbull, 1961), at the end of
578 Chapter 6. There it is seen that Amabosu sided with his sister, and
626 consequently shared what everyone agreed was at least partly her guilt.
Arobanai and Amabosu's mother, Sau, were the two who intervened
to stop the fight when it began to get beyond bounds.

Amabosu, who intervened to help his sister, now found himself
associated with her in her obstinate disregard of public opinion, so
he ignored her and contented himself with continuing, from time to
time, to make uncomplimentary remarks about her husband. This
created a strain between Amabosu and his wife, Ekianga's sister, and
while Sau became the protectress of her daughter-in-law, Arobanai
became the protectress of her young co-wife.

One night Arobanai grumbled loud and long throughout the small
hours until, about an hour before dawn, she came out into midcamp
and woke everyone up with a torrent of abuse that was delivered with
such vigor and evident sincerity that men came tumbling out of their
huts holding their spears, ready for a large-scale fight. Arobanai had
named just about everyone in the camp for some kind of offense,
all of which contributed, she said, to Ekianga's delinquency. To em-
phasize her points she clapped her hands each time and pointed.
[20] Masisi tried to quiet her down by imitating her and laughing at her,
[522] but all but a few were too sleepy to see much humor in the situation,
and when he saw he was not achieving anything he abruptly told
Arobanai to "close her teeth" and then walked away. Ekianga came
out of his hut and also quietly tried to pacify his irate wife, but was
equally unsuccessful. Others tried similarly and made equally little
impression. Sleep was impossible, and everyone sat around huddled
over their family hearth, cold and miserable, listening to the still un-
diminished flow of invective. Occasionally a finely turned phrase
brought some nervous laughter, but on the whole Arobanai was not
going after dramatic effect, she was merely cataloguing all the dis-
turbances of the past few months and laying them at her husband's
door. After over an hour of nonstop tirade Arobanai began to wind
up her argument with an indictment of both Kamaikan and Amabosu.
Kamaikan could have resisted Ekianga's attentions, she said, and she
added that she had resisted them often enough herself. But Kamaikan

GOVERNMENT: EXTERNAL

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Usually the *capita* first made a plea from midcamp, and was listened to silently, but without respect and without reply. He then went from family to family, and from each family, despite the presence of the villager, received an emphatic and final negative answer. If the villager is not present on such an occasion, either the *capita* will act the clown as he delivers his message, or both he and his message will be ridiculed by others; there is, if anything, a greater chance of his achieving something for the village under such circumstances. P
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Respect for age is not conveyed upon the *capita* when acting in that capacity. Not only is he ridiculed, but if he persists in his efforts on behalf of the village, even his juniors, family members or otherwise, will combine to "shut his teeth." In areas where the occasional wealthy tourist passes by, the Mbuti regard him as they regard villagers, as animals to be eaten, and the *capita* fills the same role, but generally with more success for the rewards are usually more immediate and satisfying to all concerned. In other respects the situation is parallel to that of the village. P
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The difficulty is no less, even if the Mbuti are already in the village. If the villagers try to exert pressure on them as a band through the *capita*/Chief relationship, this precipitates an immediate return to the forest because the men will not even discuss the matter in the village. Their return may just be for purposes of discussion, but it may also lead to the return of the entire band. The men seem to regard it primarily as their province, the village, in a sense, being a hunting area calling for skill and courage, rather than a gathering area, and they explain their action in these terms, allowing that their wives could come if they really had something to say. P
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The band/village relationship, then, is not to be considered as highly effective, though there are times when the Mbuti find it expedient to act in concert in this way.

Lineage Elders/Kpara

The relationship of an Mbuti lineage to a village lineage is a little more effective, for while a band cannot be recognized as a unilineal entity, there are within it divers lineal units. One or more of these may well occupy a hereditary relationship with a village lineage, the head of which would be the *kpara*. They have no name for the head of their lineage except "old man," the term by which the villagers also refer to him. C
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As stated earlier, this relationship may be exceptionally cordial,

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- 156 usually are. Both Manyalibo and his wife were great humorists, and
• [522] they made use of the powers of ridicule to break up some of the
[626] more serious disputes, because there is nothing that upsets a Pygmy
more than being laughed at.

[551] The oldest member of the group, a member of the same family
though even more distantly related, was old Tungana, who had so
many children and grandchildren that neither he nor his wife could
156 remember all their names. Strangely enough, he was a progressive
1177 Pygmy, and whereas Manyalibo was constantly decrying the Pygmy
888 plantation in his deep bass voice, Tungana thought it was fine. He
also thought living near the village was a good thing as there was
so much good food to be had for the stealing. And wasn't stealing
easier than hunting? I think the truth was that poor old Tungana was
getting too old to follow the hunting band with ease, and he was
afraid of being abandoned. In fact, he often remained behind in the
village when the rest were far off in the forest, and one of his many
sons would come in every few days bringing the old couple gifts of
meat and forest fruits.

[551] Moke was another of the elders. He claimed a fictional relation-
[608] ship with Tungana because it made him feel at home, since he had
no real relatives in the group other than his own children. Moke was
the greatest traditionalist of all, and when the Pygmy plantations
were mentioned in front of him he just laughed dryly to himself
and smiled his toothless smile, saying he had not tasted any Pygmy
bananas yet, but if any grew then he would be glad to eat them.

156 It was Moke who had come with Kolongo and Njobo to cut the
marks on my forehead three years earlier. Kolongo had been as much
of a traditionalist as Moke, as indeed were all his family, particularly
the wizened old mother, Balekimito, and his oldest sister, Asofalinda,
who was now a widow and thoroughly enjoying her freedom. Moke
had thought of her as a companion for his old age, but Asofalinda
liked life as it was, so Moke was still a widower and she a widow.

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342 closed on hinges. The only other hut to have a door was that of
[184] Njobo, which was at the opposite end and also faced down the middle, but not quite so blatantly as Ekianga's. The rest had leaf-covered frames which were simply pulled across the opening to close it.

342 My house was built opposite Njobo's, with the old witch Sau
123 and her son Amabosu to my right. At first the Pygmies were going
122 to build me the biggest house ever built in the forest—bigger than Camp Putnam. We finally compromised and when the framework of interlaced saplings was finished I had two rooms, each about ten
[476] feet square. Even so, I knew it would never be finished, for by then the number of workers was dropping off rapidly; so I suggested mudding the walls of only one room, but leafing the whole roof so that our "village" would have a veranda. This was thought to be a fine idea.

761 One day I was on my way out to the plantation with Kenge,
763 Manyalibo and Moke, when on the way we met Cephu's handsome
152 nephew, Kelemoke, a very light-skinned youth who had two children even lighter than he. He was wailing and crying, and told us that Cephu's daughter, only a few years old, had just died. He then
761 continued on his way, wailing loudly. I expected the others to turn
763 back, but they continued as though nothing had happened. Kenge
152 made some remark about Cephu's virility and the others snorted with
• 522 laughter. Kenge had the charming habit of laughing at his own jokes, which seemed funnier to him the more he thought about them, so he was still clapping his side and doubling up and shouting to the forest what a funny joke it was when we reached the plantation.
763 Then he stopped. Although we could see nobody, Moke called out
761 quietly that Cephu's daughter had died, and Njobo and Masisi and
152 a few others appeared from where they had been "working," looking rather cross at being disturbed. Njobo said it was a nuisance. The
[765] girl was his wife's niece, and this meant that his wife would keep

THE GOOD DEATH OF BALEKIMITO

him awake with her wailing and would probably forget to cook for him. He set off at once for the village, grumbling, and Moke went with him. Masisi started one of his loud tirades, saying in his sharp voice that Cephu never looked after his children properly, so it was no wonder they died. This must have reminded Kenge of his joke, because he started laughing again, or perhaps he was laughing at Masisi, but Masisi got angrier than ever and said he was going straight to the village to tell Cephu what he thought of him. He stamped angrily after Njobo and Moke, still shouting deprecating remarks about the bereaved father. 763
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Kenge laughed happily and said that there was going to be a dreadful noise when Masisi got back to the village, so we would do better to stay where we were until it was all over. Manyalibo, who had not said a word, suggested looking for *itaba*, a sweet edible root, and with food our foremost thought we set off. [522]

When we got back to the village in the late afternoon we found everyone sitting around outside their little houses, staring gloomily at nothing in particular. Masisi was still talking loudly, pointing at the sky and over in the direction of Cephu's camp, from which I could hear women wailing, and saying that it was a shame that Cephu should let his children die and cause everyone so much trouble. Tungana mournfully said that he didn't like funerals; the Negroes made so much noise at them. Masisi's younger brother, Mambunia, still a bachelor because one of his legs was crippled with paralysis and he was not able to hunt well enough to support a family, added in shrill falsetto that Cephu was so inconsiderate and such a trouble-maker that he would probably let his daughter die completely—completely and absolutely. [764]
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I did not understand what he meant at first, but it provoked an immediate response from Asofalinda, Ekianga's widowed sister. She strode across the camp, marching with long swinging strides to where Mambunia was sitting, his paralyzed leg stuck out in front 763
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000 village at all costs. Rather to my surprise this struck the Pygmies as
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764 being funny, and they began sniggering. Kenge, carefully dusting
177 the last specks of earth from his spotless shorts, pretended to be
• 522 severe and said this was no time for laughter. He then promptly
cracked a joke at the expense of the Negroes and joined his friends
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[201] in howls of mirth. When Pygmies laugh it is hard not to be af-
fected; they hold onto one another as if for support, slap their sides,
snap their fingers, and go through all manner of physical contortions.
If something strikes them as particularly funny they will even roll on
the ground, but this time the disapproving looks they got from the
Negroes discouraged them.

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764 The Negroes, having restored order, went on to the business of
settling who was responsible for the death of the child. To them no
death is natural; some evil spirit, some witch or sorcerer, had cursed
the girl with dysentery and made her die. They tried to find out
who had been fighting in Cephu's camp, who were the enemies of
the girl's family. Their concern was a real one, for if the witch was
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[761] not found, it might strike at them next. But the Pygmies were not
[177] co-operative. They were bored and listless. The girl had died and
that was that. The Negroes finally gave up and we all returned,
washing from head to foot as we crossed over the Nepussi.

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765 Back in the main camp everything was normal. Only in Cephu's
little camp was there quiet, subdued wailing from the house of the
child's parents. There was some discussion as to whether or not the
molimo should be called out. Cephu said in an aggressive manner
that it should be, the only trouble being that he didn't have one.
Certain families own them; others do not but when in need can
borrow them from relatives. Cephu promptly called on Njobo, who
reluctantly agreed.

That night, after the evening meal, a small number of men from
the main camp went over to Cephu's camp and sat down around
the central fire. The women and children were in their huts; some

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181 singing snatches of songs and shouting back and forth to one another
484 about all the animals they were going to kill and eat.
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152 Occasionally we heard an echo of our own voices coming back
522 from the depths of the forest. Then we stopped, and one by one
822 the young men shouted bold phrases to imaginary maidens, holding
their noses and mouths, ready to stifle the shriek of laughter that
would come when the same rude challenge was shouted back at
them. They clapped one another on the back and held onto one
another for support as they laughed, inventing all sorts of things
they would do and say to any girl who answered them in such a
152 way. The Pygmy is not in the least self-conscious about showing
522 his emotions; he likes to laugh until tears come to his eyes and he
is too weak to stand. He then sits down or lies on the ground and
laughs still louder.

139 As we went on the forest became more spacious, and it seemed
484 lighter, although the trees still met high overhead and shut out all
direct sunlight. There was no need to worry about overhanging
branches now, for here the forest was virgin, untouched by the
sacreligious hand of the village cultivator, and clear of heavy under-
growth. The ground was soft underfoot, carpeted with leaves that
[481] sometimes concealed a projecting root. But the pygmies knew where
every obstacle was, even though they could not see it, and they
picked up their feet to avoid tripping.

On all sides we could see for twenty or thirty yards. The giant
trunks of the old trees were surrounded by slender, branchless sap-
lings, all so far apart that we could wander off the path freely at
[487] almost any point. Here and there the main path was crossed by a
smaller path made by some animal, and Kenge frequently turned off
and followed the animal trail, beckoning me to follow. A few min-
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186
utes later he would stop and sit down on his bundle, and then
when the rest appeared along the main path he would jump to his
feet and make fun of them for "walking like the BaNgwana." The

THE MAKING OF CAMP LELO

work. Then she took the leaves we had collected and slit the stalks ³⁴² toward the end, like clothespins, hooking two or three of them together. When she had enough she started hanging them on the framework like tiles, overlapping each other and forming a water-proof covering. There were leaves left over when she had finished, so she let other women take them for their houses.

Everyone was working at something, and all were chattering and making fun of the late-comers who had not yet finished leafing their huts, saying how wet they were going to get when the rain came. But ³⁴²
I noticed that those who had already finished, like Masamba, even ⁴⁷²
went back to the forest to cut more wood and leaves to help the lazy ^[522] stragglers who had spent too much time gathering food and eating it on the way in. Sometimes there were as many as four women working on one hut, some hanging leaves from the outside, working upward, others preferring to work from the inside, pushing the leaves through the lattice and working from the top down. Once in a while ^[855] there was a loud wail as some playful child got in the way and was soundly slapped by his mother.

Just before dusk there was a sudden darkening and a wind swept ¹³² through the tree tops making leaves and small branches fall to the ground, spinning and fluttering lightly. Then with a sudden hissing sound, loud and ominous, the sky seemed to open and the rain came pouring down. In the villages, the rain comes down so hard that it can almost hurt you, stinging the skin and blowing into the eyes and nose and mouth, but in the forest its fall is broken by the trees and by the time it reaches the ground it has spent its energy.

There were angry shouts from the men as the lightning flashed ^[821] and the thunder rumbled on and on, and they peered anxiously from the tiny entrances to their huts to see when it was going to end. If it went on too long it would spoil the hunting for tomorrow. My hut ¹²² was filled with the bachelors, all of whom Kenge had grandly invited ¹³² in. He explained that they were too old to sleep with their parents ⁵⁸⁹

THE SONG OF THE FOREST

Makubasi wandered about aimlessly, poking here and there from habit to see if there was any tasty fruit to be had for the picking, but it was too dark to see. ⁷⁶⁵₁₈₂

Just as I was about to ask where the others had gone they re-appeared, announcing their presence with low whistles that sounded like the call of a night bird. They were in two pairs, each pair carrying between them, over their shoulders, a long slender object. Even at that moment I wondered if they would veer off into the complete blackness of the forest before I could see more closely, but they came on toward us. Madyadya was carrying the rear end of what proved to be a huge tube of some kind, fifteen feet long. He gestured proudly and said, "See, this is our molimo!" Then he turned and putting his mouth to the end of the trumpet, which it was, he blew a long, raucous raspberry. Everyone doubled up with laughter, the first sound they had made since leaving camp. ⁷⁶⁵₅₃₄ [533] [522] •

I was slightly put out by this sacrilege and was about to blame it rather pompously on irreligious youth, when I saw something that upset me even more. I do not know exactly what I had expected, but I knew a little about molimo trumpets and that they were sometimes made out of bamboo. I suppose I had expected an object elaborately carved, decorated with patterns full of ritual significance and symbolism, something sacred, to be revered, the very sight or touch of which might be thought of as dangerous. I felt that I had a right, in the heart of the tropical rain forest, to expect something wonderful and exotic. But now I saw that the instrument which produced such a surprisingly rude sound, shattering the stillness as it shattered my illusions, was not made of bamboo or wood, and it certainly was not carved or decorated in any way. It was a length of metal drainpipe, neatly threaded at each end, though somewhat bent in the middle. The second trumpet was just the same, shining and sanitary, but only half the length. ⁷⁶⁵₅₃₄
₁₂₃
₁₇₇

Everyone was looking at me to see what my reactions would be.

THE SONG OF THE FOREST

pulled across the entrances to the little huts, and only the men were left outside.

Njobo was there to greet us, and the first thing he asked was whether I had been able to keep up with the others, or if I had "walked like the BaNgwana." He then turned to the others with an obvious "I told you so" air and said, "You see, it is all right; he knows how to walk." This apparently slight compliment was in fact a very real one, because to the Pygmy it is one of the most important differences between the people of the forest and the people of the village that the latter do *not* know "how to walk." Walking, to the Pygmy, means being able to run swiftly and silently, without slipping, tripping or falling. Every day he depends for his food on his ability to "walk," and more than once his life will be saved by the same ability, when he has to run from a charging buffalo or creep away unnoticed from a sleeping leopard.

Masisi, unbelieving, asked if I had not fallen at least once, and when he was told I had, he roared with laughter. Masimongo, who had been another to object to my going, pointed to my torn clothes, dripping with water and perspiration, and filthy where I had fallen, and he too laughed. Nobody mentioned the molimo.

Kenge came up and asked disapprovingly why I had gone off so quickly without telling him. He said he had cooked dinner and now it was all cold and I would have to go without. He gave my clothes a withering look and said he would wash them out the next day, and that I had better take them off now and get dry. I went over to my hut and changed, and when I came out he had a piping hot meal waiting by a blazing fire.

What followed that evening was to follow every evening for the next two months. It was the focal point of the molimo festival, and the repetition every night was an essential part of it. The ceremony, if you can call it that, did not center around ritual objects, as do the

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[123] expectancy. Every evening, when the women shut themselves up,
[765] pretending that they were afraid to see "the animal of the forest";
[562] every evening, when the men gathered around the fire, pretending
[825] they thought that the women thought the drainpipes were animals;
every evening, when the trumpet drainpipes imitated leopards and
elephants and buffalos—every evening, when all this make-believe
was going on, I felt that something very real and very great was
going on beneath it, something that everyone else took for granted,
and about which only I was ignorant.

[765] It was as though the songs which lured the "animal" to the
[533] fireside also invoked some other kind of presence. As the evenings
[535] wore on toward morning, the songs got more and more serious, and
[781] the atmosphere not exactly tense but charged with an emotion power-
ful enough to send the dancers swirling through the molimo fire as
though its flames and red-hot coals held no heat, as though the glow-
ing embers were cold ashes. Yet there was nothing fanatic or frenzied
[825] about their action in dancing through the fire. Then there was always
that point when the "animal" left the camp and returned to the
forest, taking the presence with it. I could feel it departing as the
mellow, wistful voice of the molimo got farther and farther away.

[765] The morning rampages carried no such presence with them; they
[534] seemed more tangible both in actuality and in purpose. I learned that
after these rampages the trumpets were brought back to the Lelo
River, just above where the men bathed, and immersed there during
the daytime so that the women would not see them. One day there
was a terrible storm and the Lelo rose four or five feet, transformed
into a torrent. When the rain abated in the late afternoon Madyadya
went to look for the trumpets and found that one of them had been
[522] washed away. This caused tremendous hilarity, though of course
everyone tried to disguise what they were talking about in front of
the women. The women, playing the same game, pretended not to

THE FOREST PEOPLE

835 happened. All the youths told me not to worry about Kelemoke, that
684 they were secretly bringing him food in the forest, he was not far
away.

835 Three days later, when the hunt returned in the late afternoon,
684 Kelemoke came wandering idly into the camp behind them, as though
626 he too had been hunting. He looked around cautiously, but nobody
said a word or even looked at him. If they ignored him, at least they
did not curse him. He came over to the bachelor's fire and sat down.
For several minutes the conversation continued as though he were not
there. I saw his face twitching, but he was too proud to speak first.
Then a small child was sent over by her mother with a bowl of food,
which she put in Kelemoke's hands and gave him a shy, friendly
smile.

[554] Kelemoke never flirted with his cousin again, and now, five years
later, he is happily married and has two fine children. He does not
have leprosy, and he is one of the best liked and most respected of
the hunters.

526 I have never heard of anyone being completely ostracized, but the
threat is always there, and is usually sufficient to insure good be-
havior. The two attitudes which disturb the Pygmy most are con-
tempt and ridicule. Contempt is most effectively shown by ignoring
someone, even if he comes and sits at the same fire. But it is difficult
to maintain for long because hunters cannot afford to ignore a fellow
hunter. So ostracism of this kind is infrequent and does not last.
Almost as effective, and of much longer duration, is ridicule. The
[157]
[181] BaMbuti are good-natured people with an irresistible sense of humor;
[522] they are always making jokes about one another, even about them-
selves, but their humor can be turned into an instrument of punish-
ment when they choose.

593 Such a case was a great fight between the same two brothers who
578 had fallen out over Kelemoke's misdemeanors, Aberi and Masalito.

THE PLAY WORLD OF THE BAMBUTI

spirit-animal and he was going to attack you so I drove him into the hole and I dare not leave it or he will come out and kill you! Run and get your spear and save me, your poor Pygmy!" The villager was scared out of his wits and ran away. Asofalinda promptly hid the plantains elsewhere and quickly returned to the hole. 538 776 177

At this point in the story, Masamba, Njobo's wife, came to help act out the rest. Asofalinda crouched at the foot of a tree, pretending that she was covering a hole in the ground, and Masamba, acting the part of the villager, crept onto the scene, carrying a spear and looking very frightened. As they acted the scene, the villager came up behind Asofalinda and asked timidly if the spirit-animal was still there. "Yes," said Asofalinda, over her shoulder. "But I have used my magic and sung it to sleep so that you will be able to kill it. But you must be very quiet and very careful. You are the only one who could do it, you are so big and strong and clever, not like we poor Pygmies." 538 536 776 177 [789]

Saying this, she slowly uncovered the hole and whispered to the villager to stoop down and peer in. Masamba then cautiously bent over and peered into the imaginary hole. "No," said Asofalinda, "you will have to look deeper. It is a big hole and the spirit-animal is right at the back. But you must be very quiet or it will wake up and kill you first." So Masamba stooped lower and Asofalinda finished the scene with no further commentary. It was hardly necessary. She crept behind Masamba and kicked her heartily in the backside. and ran off laughing and clapping her hands with mirth. Even Masamba, who suffered the brunt of the joke, enjoyed it so much that the two of them re-enacted it four times that one afternoon. [522] •

In ways like this, even on a rainy day when there is no hunting or gathering to be done, a camp can be made lively and entertaining. But generally rain brings depression. People sit in their huts and peer out miserably. On the whole, however, the tenor of life is even, wet 512 821 181

FOREST HORIZONS

tall," he said, "but we call him Ebamunyama, because his father 123
killed a buffalo, and he hunts with us in our forest."

We left early in the morning. It would have been earlier if Kenge 484
had not found an agreeable girl to sleep with, who insisted on cook- 133
ing him an elaborate breakfast. But we finally got away about an [837]
hour after sunrise and headed eastward. The ground was much more
hilly than in the Epulu area, but the forest itself was much the same:
tall and grand, dimly illuminated by the same filtered light. Under-
foot the ground was even more clear of vegetation, as for the most
part we were well above the streams and rivers. It was more rocky, 484
and we passed a number of caves, where our guide, an elderly Pygmy 485
with a serious face that kept breaking out into wrinkled smiles, told 133
us that we could pass the night if we were delayed, or if his friends
had gone on to another camp. I did not much fancy the idea, and
on looking inside one grotto I liked it even less; it was damp, and
full of rotting leaves where some earlier travelers had made them-
selves a bed. There was barely room to sit up, and if it rained the
water would certainly have drained into the cave.

We passed several trees of a kind I had not seen before, and Kenge 137
said he had seen them only at the extreme northern boundaries of 824
the Epulu district. The roots climbed into the air, gigantic gnarled
spirals, almost as thick as a man's body, joining the main trunk
which towered above. Our guide told us that the Mabudo called this
the "elephant tree," because they always took refuge in one if they
were attacked by elephants. He dodged inside one to show us, hiding
behind the roots. Even a Mabudo would have been able to stand up-
right with perfect ease. But the roots were close together, and an ele-
phant could only get its trunk between them, he explained. And
then the Mabudo sliced it off with their machettis. He imitated the [522] •
action, laughing at the ridiculous picture he presented, trying to be
the elephant and the Mabudo at one and the same time.

Kenge asked in amazement if the Mabudo actually came so far 000

P Kenge asked in amazement THE FOREST PEOPLE
C if the Mabudo actually came so far
224 into the forest. The old man said that they did, but not very often.
[186] They came to dig traps or set up spear-falls for elephant. They both
laughed at the strange hunting methods of the villagers. The digging
of a trap was a long and arduous task, as was the setting up of a
spear-fall. The latter method is particularly difficult. A stout spear
blade is hafted into a heavy tree trunk which then has to be hauled
up high above the ground. A vine is stretched underneath and acts
as the trigger to release it. But the animals soon come to recognize
any kind of trap and simply avoid it. We passed several, and sure
enough we could see the tracks going right up to the edge, then
carefully circling around in safety.

Kenge could not get over the notion of hiding from an elephant
among the roots of a tree instead of going out and spearing it as any
Pygmy would. For the rest of the day, whenever we passed an ele-
phant tree he would dodge in among the roots, while the old guide
pranced around outside pretending that he was the elephant, stoop-
ing down and swinging one arm loosely in front of him as though
it were an elephant's trunk.

P This slowed our progress, and in the late afternoon our guide
484 suddenly put on pace. It was nearly dark when we climbed up a
high ridge and followed it for a mile or two. At the end, before
descending, we stopped and listened, and from down below, to the
left, we heard the unmistakable sounds of a Pygmy camp—chatter-
ing, laughing; children playing and babies crying; and here and
there someone singing. It was like being home again, and Kenge
was all for going straight down. But our guide made us wait while
P he went ahead and warned of our approach. It would have been per-
484
609 fectly possible for the camp to have been deserted by the time we
reached it, if the Pygmies had thought that we were in any way
undesirable company. As it was, when we finally appeared they all
stood around in a silent and curious circle to welcome us, each family
outside its hut, uncertain and shy.